

TO: Heads of Federal agencies

SUBJECT: Pre-accessioning permanent electronic records

EXPIRATION DATE: July 31, 2006

1. What is the purpose of this bulletin? This bulletin defines what NARA means when discussing pre-accessioning of electronic records with archival value and describes the criteria for determining when pre-accessioning is appropriate.

2. What is pre-accessioning? Pre-accessioning is when NARA fully processes permanently valuable electronic records in order to assume physical custody before the records are scheduled to become part of the National Archives of the United States. During processing, NARA will copy the records onto archival quality media, verify the adequacy of the technical documentation, prepare the documentation according to NARA standards, and write draft descriptions of the records for later inclusion into NARA's Archival Research Catalog once the records are transferred into NARA's legal custody. The transferring agency retains legal custody of the pre-accessioned electronic records until the records are scheduled to come under the legal custody of NARA. This allows NARA to preserve the records early in their lifecycle while the agency retains its authority and responsibility for providing access. It also provides the agency with off-site, no-cost security copies of the pre-accessioned records.

3. What records will NARA pre-accession? NARA will pre-accession only electronic records that have been appraised as permanent. NARA will make the decision to pre-accession records on a case-by-case basis in consultation with the agency.

4. What records are appropriate for pre-accessioning? NARA is more likely to pre-accession records when the records:

- are part of an active agency dissemination program. Pre-accessioning permits the agency to protect its dissemination program while turning preservation over to NARA;
- have clearly defined cut off dates and are not cumulative, such as e-mail records and publications;
- contain highly sensitive information over which the agency wants to maintain access control; or
- are snapshots, taken at appropriate intervals, of dynamic databases with information that is constantly being updated.

5. What records are not likely to be pre-accessioned? NARA would likely decline to pre-accession databases that are cumulative in nature. Cumulative databases are those that only have new information added with none of the old information being changed or deleted. To pre-accession such databases would require NARA to fully re-process previously processed records during subsequent pre-accessioning transfers or at the time of accessioning.

6. What reference service will NARA provide on pre-accessioned records? NARA will provide at no cost copies of pre-accessioned records to the agency upon request. If NARA receives an inquiry about pre-accessioned records, NARA will refer the researcher to the agency and will not respond to any question about the nature or contents of the records or possible access to the records. The agency will be responsible for responding to all discovery efforts, Freedom of Information Act requests, and other reference inquiries.

7. What are the pre-accessioning procedures?

a. NARA and the agency agree that NARA should pre-accession a body of electronic records into the physical custody of the National Archives. The agency retains legal custody of the pre-accessioned electronic records.

b. The agency completes and signs an *Agreement to Transfer Records to the National Archives* (SF 258) and submits it to NARA. Block 11 contains the date that the records will be eligible for acceptance into the legal custody of the National Archives.

c. NARA processes the records and then countersigns the SF 258 in block 3A and returns a copy to the agency.

d. When the time agreed to accept the records into the legal custody of the National Archives arrives (the date specified in block 11), NARA notifies the agency.

e. If the agency has no objection, NARA will sign in block 16 to accept the records into the legal custody of National Archives of the United States.

f. At that time, NARA assumes responsibility for providing reference services for the electronic records.

8. Who do I contact for additional information? For additional information on pre-accessioning, contact the Archival Services Manager, Electronic and Special Media Records Services Division (NWME), at (301) 837-3420 or cer@nara.gov.

John W. Carlin
Archivist of the United States